



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MEXICAN NATIONAL SENTENCED TO 12 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON
ON FIREARMS SMUGGLING CHARGES**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that in San Antonio this afternoon, 44-year-old Ernesto Garza of Monterrey, Mexico, was sentenced to 12 years in prison on federal firearms charges related to a smuggling operation.

On August 25, 2008, after a jury was picked to hear the case against him, Garza pleaded guilty to one count each of conspiracy to obtain firearms by making false statements and smuggling firearms into Mexico.

According to the factual basis filed in the case, Garza conspired to buy guns using "straw purchasers" and then smuggle the guns into Mexico. Because of his citizenship status, he was not entitled to buy guns in the United States. Garza paid people in the United States to buy the guns for him and then lie about who the guns were for. In June 2005, Garza first began trafficking primarily in hunting rifles. However, in 2006 and up to October 2007 when he was arrested, Garza trafficked in high-powered, high-capacity handguns and assault rifles such as the FN 57 caliber pistol and the FNH PS90 rifle. Garza was the organizer and leader in the conspiracy involving at least nine other individuals who were purchasing firearms on his behalf. At least 50 weapons were purchased as part of this ring and smuggled to Mexico. One of the FN 57 pistols was recovered in Mexico after being used in a running gun battle between alleged drug dealers and Mexican soldiers in Xoxocutla on May 7, 2008. Two Mexican soldiers were killed as a result of the incident.

This case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the San Antonio Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Mark Roomberg prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

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